



Panhandle News

BENEWAH, BONNER, BOUNDARY, KOOTENAI & SHOSHONE COUNTIES

ECONOMIC TRENDS

For almost two decades now, Kootenai County has seen a steady increase in monthly employment. In fact, July and August 2002 are the only two months since January 1988 when employment fell below the year-earlier level. That was fallout from the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks when tourism took a big tumble, and manufacturing and Internet-related companies had posted significant job losses from the recession and the bursting of the dot-com bubble.

By contrast, the national economy has experienced 44 months during the 1991-1992 and 2001-2003 recessions when nonfarm payrolls were lower than the same month the year before. In that period, Kootenai County seemed oblivious to the nation's economic problems.

Bonner County has been almost as fortunate, experiencing only 10 months since January 1988 when its employment was lower than it had been a year earlier – in 1991 during the recession, in 1999 and 2000 when catalog retailer Coldwater Creek laid off workers and the timber industry had problems and in April 2003 when a K-Mart closed and weather conditions were bad.

On the other hand, with their high dependence on the volatile lumber industry, Benewah and Boundary counties have suffered longer runs of below-year-earlier employment than the nation did. Benewah County had 54 of those months and Boundary County 50. Whenever lumber prices dropped – during the 1991 recession, during the trade volatility of 1998-2000 and during 2002-2004 when housing activity was depressed and competition from Canada was intense – Benewah County experienced a downturn. Boundary County's economy also turned down

Panhandle Table 1: Coeur d'Alene MSA Labor Force & Employment
Kootenai County

	Mar 2007*	Feb 2007	Mar 2007	% Change From	
				Last Month	Last Year
INDIVIDUALS BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE					
<i>Seasonally Adjusted</i>					
Civilian Labor Force	70,320	70,100	68,990	0.3	1.9
Unemployed	2,210	2,230	2,630	-0.9	-16.0
% of Labor Force Unemployed	3.1	3.2	3.8		
Total Employment	68,110	67,870	66,360	0.4	2.6
<i>Unadjusted</i>					
Civilian Labor Force	68,950	69,040	67,870	-0.1	1.6
Unemployed	3,030	3,270	3,390	-7.3	-10.6
% of Labor Force Unemployed	4.4	4.7	5.0		
Total Employment	65,920	65,770	64,480	0.2	2.2
JOBS BY PLACE OF WORK					
Nonfarm Payroll Jobs** - NAICS	54,380	53,710	52,430	1.2	3.7
<i>Goods-Producing Industries</i>	10,800	10,620	10,460	1.7	3.3
Natural Resources & Mining	420	450	410	-6.7	2.4
Construction	5,640	5,430	5,460	3.9	3.3
Manufacturing	4,740	4,740	4,590	0.0	3.3
Wood Product Manufacturing	980	970	980	1.0	0.0
Other Manufacturing	3,760	3,770	3,610	-0.3	4.2
<i>Service-Providing Industries</i>	43,580	43,090	41,970	1.1	3.8
Trade, Transportation, & Utilities	10,560	10,460	9,770	1.0	8.1
Wholesale Trade	1,560	1,540	1,430	1.3	9.1
Retail Trade	7,870	7,770	7,300	1.3	7.8
Transportation, Warehousing & Utilities	1,130	1,150	1,040	-1.7	8.7
Information	950	940	980	1.1	-3.1
Financial Activities	3,010	3,000	2,800	0.3	7.5
Professional & Business Services	6,090	5,980	5,940	1.8	2.5
Educational & Health Services	5,330	5,300	5,260	0.6	1.3
Leisure & Hospitality	6,530	6,340	6,210	3.0	5.2
Other Services	1,440	1,420	1,440	1.4	0.0
Government Education	3,830	3,810	3,760	0.5	1.9
Government Administration	5,060	5,100	5,120	-0.8	-1.2
Government Tribes	780	740	690	5.4	13.0

* Preliminary estimate

**Full- or part-time jobs of people who worked for or received wages in the pay period including the 12th of the month

when lumber prices were low, but it suffered an additional dip in 2005 when the CEDU educational programs and schools closed.

But Shoshone County, which has struggled for more than two decades, had twice as many months of lower unemployment – 88 – than the nation. Employment trailed year-earlier levels through nearly all of 1991 when many mines closed and the lumber industry shrank. There were a few bad months in 1993 and 1997. Another round of mine closures and lumber downsizing started in September 1998 and lasted through the next year. There was only a brief respite before more mine layoffs and tough time for timber, tourism and manu-

facturing launched a string of 28 bad months through 2002. The last decline in March and April 2004 was modest, and since then, Shoshone County has seen its longest period of uninterrupted growth since the 1970s.

AREA DEVELOPMENTS

THE RESERVATION AND BEYOND

The Coeur d'Alene Reservation encompasses western Benewah County including the cities of DeSmet and Plummer and southern Kootenai County including Worley. The Coeur d'Alene Tribe employs 500 people at its tribal headquarters, school, retail operations, farm and Benewah Medical & Wellness Center in Benewah County, and another 750 people at its tribal casino, hotel, golf course and convenience store in Worley. The success is notable. In 1996, the tribe employed just 256 people in Benewah County and 131 in Kootenai County. Where western Benewah County once had double-digit unemployment rates, the tribe has created so many job opportunities that it now has to import workers from Coeur d'Alene and Spokane by bus.

With the reservation's labor pool tapped out, the tribe recently decided to build a 100,000-square-foot manufacturing plant on 30 acres near the Kimball office furniture plant in Post Falls rather than on the reservation. The plant primarily will house a satellite operation of Berg Integrated Systems, which the tribe has held majority ownership in since last summer. Over the next few years, up to 150 workers could be hired to make mobile units for military and humanitarian organizations. After the tribe's purchase, Berg Integrated Systems moved from Coeur d'Alene to a 50,000-square-foot facility in Plummer and ramped up from six to 40 workers, mainly steel fabricators. After the Post Falls plant opens in early 2008, the Plummer facility will continue to serve as Berg Integrated Systems headquarters. The Post Falls facility also will provide space for expansion of two other Berg companies, which make tents and trailers in the Spokane Valley. There is a possibility that Berg will eventually move its 100 workers in the Spokane Valley to Post Falls.

Circling Raven, the Coeur d'Alene tribe's golf course in Worley, is getting great press. David Christenson, the club's golf director, was named one of the 20 "Most Admired Course Operators in the Nation" following a nationwide poll conducted by Golf Inc. magazine. The Golfer's World blog encouraged golfers to visit Circling Raven, which "has won tons of awards" since it opened.

BENEWAH COUNTY

- The St. Maries School District is one of 26 organizations nationwide to receive grants from the U.S. Forest Service for innovative uses of woody biomass. The school district received a \$250,000 grant to help pay for a new \$670,000 heating system for Heyburn Elementary School. By using wood waste rather than oil to heat the school, the district estimates it can save more than \$2 million over 30 years. The Panhandle Area Council, the region's lead economic development agency, is working with the district to secure the remaining financing for the new heating system.
- The Gem State Bar and Grill in St. Maries recently added an arcade geared toward teens. The arcade includes a pool table, jukebox, air hockey, foosball, race car and hunting video games and pinball machines.

BONNER COUNTY

- When the ski season ended on April 8, Schweitzer Mountain Resort near Sandpoint held a farewell party for the resort's first chairlift, which has carried skiers since the resort opened in 1963. This summer, the resort will add two high-speed lifts. The ski season that just ended was Schweitzer's best season ever.
- After last year's resounding success hosting the largest job fair ever in Bonner County, the Idaho Commerce & Labor office in Sandpoint and the Greater Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce again sponsored a career fair at the Bonner County Fairgrounds in Sandpoint. The 2007 Career Fair on May 2 helped 59 employers meet with more than 500 potential job applicants. Employers and job seekers alike appreciated the opportunities to meet each other, and it looks like the fair will be an annual event.
- North Idaho College plans to expand its registered nursing program into Bonner County this fall with the help of \$60,000 from the Idaho Legislature. The money will provide a classroom and laboratory for 10 nursing students and pay for two part-time instructors at the college's center in Ponderay. The college is partnering with Bonner General Hospital and other local health care facilities for on-site training. The expansion increases the number of spots available at the school's main campus in Coeur d'Alene, and will provide 10 more highly needed registered nurses per year.

- First Lutheran Church of Sandpoint plans to create a new senior housing development called Luther Park at Sandpoint next to the church but open to people of all faiths. The community for seniors offers catered living and enhanced residents' independence and provides proximity to work and shopping opportunities along with on-site health-care. The three-story development will contain 60 one- and two-bedroom units. Some will be specifically for memory care and enhanced assisted-living care. The development also will contain a grand fireplace in a large gathering area, a library and media center, community meeting rooms and a beauty and barber shop.
 - Yoke's Fresh Market, a grocery store that anchors the Bonner Mall in Ponderay, soon will complete a \$3.5 million renovation that includes a new façade, signs and fresh paint. The renovation began last fall with new paint and signs on the outside of the store. In January, the store began interior work, renovating a department at a time so the store could remain open. Preparing for the grand re-opening on May 23, Yoke's has added 15 to 20 employees to its current work force of 100. It is also raising wages to the levels paid at the 11 Yoke's stores in Washington state. For many Yoke's employees, that means an increase of a dollar or more an hour. New employees now start at \$8.05 an hour, up from \$7.75.
 - The Idaho Humanities Council recently awarded a \$1,500 grant to Priest Lake State Park for a log flume interpretation project to help preserve the history of logging in the area and the stories of local loggers.
 - GVD Commercial Properties, which owns the former K-Mart building in Ponderay, plans to renovate the 85,000-square-foot building and rename it Ponderay Crossing. Since K-Mart closed in 1992, the building has had only a few occupants. Currently, a Liquidation World store is using about one-third of the building. After the renovation, GVD expects that three large tenants will face Highway 95 with up to five smaller tenants facing the Kootenai Cutoff. Construction recently began on a 6,000-square-foot addition at the south end of the building. When the addition is completed in July, it will be divided into two to five units. The Wireless Works, a store currently located in Ponderay, plans to move into a 1,200-square-foot storefront in the addition this summer.
 - Joe Katz, a Sandpoint resident who grew up in Philadelphia and retired from the U.S. Forest Service, recently started a new career when he and his wife opened Joe's Philly Steaks and Hoagies in Sandpoint.
- KOOTENAI COUNTY**
- The Idaho Legislature, at the request of Rep. Frank Henderson of Post Falls, appropriated \$85,000 to North Idaho College for its Workforce Training Center to teach businesses how to set-up and manage structured on-the-job training programs for their employees. Structured programs train the trainers and provide means of verifying that employees learn what they are supposed to learn.
 - Wild Waters, the 25-year-old water-slide park in Coeur d'Alene, recently began the first phase of work on a \$4 million expansion. The first phase involves building a 1,200-foot-long lazy river with a 600-gallon bucket that dumps water on floaters, a swinging rope from which swimmers will drop into a deep pool in the river and a bar that serves frozen drinks to swimmers. The \$1.5 million feature is expected to open June 22. The second phase, installing four new family tube rides, will start in early 2008 and be ready for the 2008 season. Wild Water, located immediately southeast of where Interstate 90 passes under Highway 95, employs 100 people during its season, which runs from Memorial Day to Labor Day.
 - Money Magazine recently ranked Coeur d'Alene as the best place in the country for young retirees. Coeur d'Alene stood out for the many leisure activities it offers, as well as the good dining, shopping and health care opportunities. The magazine was impressed by the area's "flourishing golf culture, which feature the world's only moveable floating green."
 - The Idaho Commerce & Labor office in Coeur d'Alene, North Idaho College and the chambers of commerce in Coeur d'Alene, Hayden, Post Falls and Rathdrum sponsored the second annual Kootenai County Job Fair on April 18 at the Kootenai County Fairgrounds in Coeur d'Alene. About 100 employers met with nearly 4,000 job seekers during the event.
 - Neider Retail Center across from Costco in Coeur d'Alene is filling up. The first tenants were Ala Carte Floral, Some Like It Hot tanning salon and H&R Block tax service. Kootenai Lawn and Garden, a lawnmower and chainsaw sales and service com-

pany, and a Sprint store that sells cell phones and accessories along with basic services recently moved in. Cena Coeur d'Alene plans to open there in early May. Cena's customers use its kitchen facilities to prepare gourmet meals for freezing and later cooking. Three to 12 entrees with side dishes can be prepared per session.

- The Post Falls Chamber of Commerce and the Post Falls School District sponsored a Reserve Job Fair on March 3 at Kimball Corp., the furniture manufacturing plant in Post Falls. High school seniors met with professionals from 100 different occupations, learning about those occupations and the skills they require. The reverse job fair placed the high school students at booths, promoting themselves to the members of the business community who browsed and asked questions. Each student was interviewed four times. The students were scored on the quality of their booths, portfolios, interview skills and presence.
- John Bowman, who owns a bicycle store in Hayden, recently opened Mountain View Cyclery and Fitness in the Milltown Center in Post Falls. The store sells bicycles, clothing and accessories and includes a repair service. It is located just off Interstate 90 on the Centennial Trail.
- The Silver Lake Mall in Coeur d'Alene welcomed two new tenants in April. Magic Marble is a gift shop featuring intricately carved marble as well as fabrics, costume jewelry and home décor. Many of its products are imported from India. Graffiti Skate Shop recently opened across from Bath and Body Works. It sells skateboards, wakeboards, snowboards and related clothing and accessories.
- American Reflections, a new shop in the Sunset Village minimall on Highway 95 in Coeur d'Alene, allows local quilters to finish their creations without traveling to Spokane or Sandpoint. At the shop, quilters use machines to join the top and bottom pieces of a quilt with patterns. Customers may rent a 12-foot or 14-foot machine for \$20 per hour after taking a \$50 instructional course. The new store is just around the corner from a complementary business, Bear Paw Quilting, which sells materials for quilts.
- Mongolian Barbecue recently opened in Coeur d'Alene. The restaurant, where stir-fry meals designed by customers are cooked right in front of customers, can seat up to 78 people inside and 28 on the patio.

- Quinn Essentials, a 6,000-square-foot store that opened in March in Post Falls, sells new furniture, lighting, carpet and other home accessories.
- Red Lion Hotels Corp. is adding 48 boat slips to the 32 boat slips currently in the Spokane River marina at Red Lion Templin's Hotel in Post Falls. The \$500,000 construction project, scheduled for completion June 1, includes eight jet-ski ramps, a 10,000-square-foot perimeter dock and a 2,000-square-foot boardwalk.

SHOSHONE COUNTY

- Lookout Pass Ski Area on the Idaho-Montana border ended its best ski season ever on April 8. By mid-February, Lookout Pass already had broken its previous record for visitors. Lookout Pass employed about 80 people this ski season, double its employment five years ago.
- Construction began in April on the Pinehurst-Kingston Public Library expansion. The library is part of the Kootenai-Shoshone Area Libraries District, which formed in the 1990s and includes libraries in Athol, Harrison, Hayden, Rathdrum and Spirit Lake. A \$3.4 million bond was passed in August 2005 to upgrade the library. The Pinehurst-Kingston Public Library was built in 1983. Only one small cosmetic remodel has occurred since. This project expands the library 1,000 square feet to over 3,000, providing a larger children's area, more space for shelving, additional computers and a large meeting room. That room will be accessible to groups after the library closes. The library also will receive new furniture, computers and other fixtures. The project is slated for completion by the beginning of September.

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